

President keeps CIA promise

President Carter keeps getting reminded of the campaign promises he has pulled back from. Now that he is following through on a very important one — reform of the CIA and other intelligence activities — he should have due credit. Indeed, all the energy programs, tax reforms, and balanced budgets in the world would ring hollow without the restoration of respect for law and honesty within the government itself. Lapses in integrity had been the central cause of America's years of crisis, and the central threat for its future. If Mr. Carter can build greater integrity into the system, the workings of all programs will be enhanced.

Representative of this Carter thrust is the reorganization of United States intelligence agencies under tightened guidelines to protect the rights of individuals and control clandestine activities. Assassinations would be prohibited outright, as they should be, under the executive order providing interim regulations until comprehensive legislation is passed. The draft legislation is said to ban efforts to overthrow democratic governments as well. This would be in line with a Carter campaign statement: "Intelligence is a service to allow foreign policy to be based on more complete information. The function of the intelligence agency should be to provide this service, not to overthrow governments or make foreign policy unilaterally or in secret."

Legitimate secrecy is best protected by eliminating wrongful secrecy. Along with the intelligence reform, the administration has in-

itiated reform of the whole security classification system, with a view to reducing unnecessary classification.

Mr. Carter may have disappointed supporters by the acceptance of a plea bargain by former CIA director Richard Helms, thus forestalling an open trial. But the new intelligence plans appear to make less likely the kind of situation in which an intelligence official decides to deceive Congress. Now the administration and Congress have been working together, with specifications for sharing information with Congress and for congressional oversight presumably more effective than in the past.

Crucial is thorough discussion of the pending legislation to ensure that new loopholes are not written into the law. Promising is the greater centralization of authority in CIA director Stansfield Turner (though not as much as once seemed possible). Thus accountability should be more easily traced — and more easily assumed by the President, who has said he would take final responsibility.

Beyond the laws and regulations, of course, the true accountability will depend on the tendencies of the men at the top. Though Admiral Turner has been criticized for harming morale by the manner of his trimming and reorganizing the CIA, he seems determined to operate within the law. Now the FBI director-designate, William Webster, has given assurances that agents under him would be expected to work within the Constitution.

On this promise, the President is doing well.